

## **Bi-Weekly Update from County Administrator/Controller Kelli Scott, 5/3/16:**

### **FireKeepers Local Revenue Sharing Board to Again Offer Grant Program**

The FireKeepers Local Revenue Sharing Board (FLRSB) met on April 29 for their third meeting of the year. Marshall Mayor Jack Reed is the FLRSB Chairman, and County Commissioner and Board Chair Derek King also serves on the FLRSB, along with officials appointed by the City of Battle Creek, Emmett Township, the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, and Athens Township. The Board approved Tier III Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) allocations totaling \$4.0 million; and Tier IV Remaining Governmental allocations totaling \$1.0 million, based on the same formula used in prior years. These steps marked the near completion of the Board's charge to distribute this year's Net Win of \$5.3 million from Casino operations. The Board approved Gabridge & Co. as the audit firm for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015, and approved the 2016 FLRSB budget. And for the final allocation step in 2016, the Revenue Sharing Board will offer \$200,000 in remaining funds for a Tier IV Discretionary Grant Program again this year. County Administration will make the applications available by mid-May for any local governments to submit project funding requests. The FLRSB is scheduled to meet next on May 13, and will set another meeting for late June or early July to consider the Discretionary Grant applications.

### **New County/City Discussions on Public Transit**

At the last quarterly meeting between County Board Chair Derek King and I, and city managers and mayors of Albion, Battle Creek, Marshall and Springfield, we focused our discussions on collaboration around addressing the gaps in public transportation throughout the County. Though this topic has emerged several times throughout my 7-year tenure with Calhoun County, this recent meeting was the first where all city leadership expressed a commitment to move forward with exploring the feasibility and implementation steps to form a County-wide Transit Authority. Since the meeting we've shared among the group recent state and regional transportation and mobility studies commissioned by the Governor's Office, through the Michigan Department of Transportation, and through our regional planning organization, Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC) and the Region 8 Regional Prosperity Initiative. All studies indicate a glaring gap in public transportation options for residents in Calhoun County, particularly those in rural areas who do not have access to the city transit systems. The County's Community Development Staff, led by Jen Bomba and Ingrid Ault, and I will meet soon with SMPC to determine next steps in engaging experts to help with determining plans and funding options for a new County-wide Transit Authority. As this project progresses, support from the County Board of Commissioners and the governing boards of the cities will be essential, and we will seek input from a broader constituency as part of the process. City and County leaders will meet again on May 19 to continue these discussions and hear from Kalamazoo County representatives on lessons learned from their recent creation of a county-wide transit authority and successful millage vote to support it.

### **New Finance Director Hired**

Calhoun County has hired a new Finance Director, following over five years of the position remaining vacant. We welcomed Michele Johnson this week into her new role as County Finance Director and member of our Administrative Executive Team. Michele comes to us with over 15 years of progressive experience in accounting, 5 of which were in management roles. Ms. Johnson earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and a Master of Science degree in Business Administration—Financial Management, and is relocating with her family to the Marshall area from California, where her husband just completed his service with the U.S. Marine Corps. Michele will be instrumental and appreciated as we begin the 2017 county budget planning process soon!

### **County Seeking Two for Vacancies on Southcentral Michigan Planning Council**

I attended on May 3 the monthly meeting of the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC), where the Board heard project updates on transportation project planning, Regional Prosperity Initiatives, and other specific planning projects for local units of government. The SMPC is our four-county regional planning council, covering Calhoun, Branch, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties. Each county has designated seats on the Board based on relative population sizes. For Calhoun County, Commissioner Kathy-Sue Dunn serves in one of our three available seats on the SMPC, and the other two are currently vacant. We are now working to identify candidates for the Board of Commissioners to appoint for these roles, and invite interested county residents to apply through our website application. The SMPC distributes hundreds of thousands of dollars each year toward local planning, economic development and transportation initiatives, and recently created a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that had been much needed for years to coordinate planning and growth efforts in our region.

### **County-Wide Leadership Updated on Spending Guidelines:**

At our April 24 County-wide meeting of judicial administrators, elected officials and department heads, the group heard from the County's audit firm, Gabridge & Co., on the latest best practices and guidance on allowable spending of public tax dollars and grant funding. Joe Verlin, CPA, highlighted certain categories of expenditures that the firm has noted through their auditing experience as causing local governments to get "tripped up" on when trying to determine allowability and reasonableness according to federal and state statutes and local policies. The county continues to increase our efforts to provide training and refresher sessions such as this one for supervisors, and others for all employees throughout the year.

### **TIF Reform Workgroup Efforts:**

Following discussions with state Representative Dave Maturen, I was asked to serve on one of four work groups recently formed to address a variety of issues and concerns raised through state legislative committee hearings and conversations regarding tax increment financing (TIF) in Michigan. Led by the Governor's Office of Urban Initiatives, these efforts are intended to review the various 10+ TIF statutes, first introduced in 1975, for possible reform as to interpretation, usage, conditions and reporting for governments who use these valuable economic development tools. The workgroup I am on has met twice this past month, and is focusing on TIF activities and spending, seeking to clarify scopes of TIF districts, update definitions within the laws, ensure authorized spending and address duplication and shifting of municipal services costs to the TIF districts. While legislative interest in TIF reform has been at an increased level and introduced bills have been sitting idle since 2014, the work groups are now progressing in a more focused manner, with a goal of making recommendations to legislators by the end of this summer.

### **County GIS Upgrade Planned**

The County's Geographical Information System (GIS) is in need of upgrades to improve functionality across different platforms and mobile devices, and to incorporate various new layers of mapping data for internal and public use. County Administration, Equalization, Information Technology and GIS Coordinator Brent Thelen are working with key elected officials, including Clerk/Register of Deeds Anne Norlander, Treasurer Christine Schauer, and others in this upgrade effort to explore additional options for using the GIS to provide convenient and online accessible public records in an integrated way through the new mapping site. After the vendor selection process is complete, we expect to seek Board of Commissioners support if required according to purchasing policies, and then begin to implement the new GIS system, which will also incorporate our most recent photography parcel layer of the entire county, funded jointly by the Calhoun County Consolidated Dispatch Authority and the County's Capital Improvement Program funds.